



# STATE-FEDERAL DISEASE ERADICATION PROGRAMS UPDATE



By Dee Ellis, DVM, MPA,  
State Veterinarian/Executive  
Director of the Texas Animal  
Health Commission

**T**exas has had so many emerging or unusual disease situations pop up recently that it has been awhile since I simply provided a general update to the many existing eradication programs that the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and our U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) partners are involved in. I know many of you in mixed practice have been involved with these programs for your entire career, so I want to keep you abreast of current events. Most of the eradication programs are federally mandated, and USDA determines when a state is “free” of a disease, but the TAHC is responsible for the day-to-day management of the eradication efforts.

The bovine tuberculosis (TB) eradication program is approaching 100 years of existence in the U.S., and Texas has been considered “free” since 2006, though we do have an infected dairy right now in the panhandle with more than 20,000 animals involved. At least 20 other dairies have already been identified to test with possible connections at press time.

I consider TB to be one of our highest priorities, even though it doesn’t always get the attention it deserves. It is important because of the historical public health importance, our charge to mitigate risks related to maintaining trade with Mexican cattle, a U.S. reservoir in Michigan deer and the fact that it is obviously circulating in the U.S. dairy industry.

The USDA has been attempting to combine and rewrite TB and cattle brucellosis rules for more than five years now but has yet to release anything. The new rules could affect the future “free” status of Texas. Loss of our “free” status could have a significant economic impact on our producers that trade internationally or interstate. By the old rules, if we find one more unrelated TB-infected cattle herd (two total), Texas could lose its status. Even though I was on the working group that helped rewrite the national TB and brucellosis rules, I have no idea when

they will be released or, truthfully, what they will say.

Texas has been bovine brucellosis “free” since 2008, but we continue to watch for the disease in a number of surveillance streams. The TAHC lab in Austin is the back-up to the national brucellosis lab and is the only state animal health lab of any size still testing cattle samples. We tested almost one million head of cattle last year from all state-inspected slaughter plants, two major USDA-inspected slaughter plants, a few sale barns voluntarily testing adult cattle and from veterinary practitioner submissions. We continue to find positive cattle but have not found any positive *Brucella abortus* herds since 2011. We routinely find *Brucella suis*-infected cattle, however.

The Texas commercial swine industry has been considered “free” of swine brucellosis since 2011 and pseudorabies “free” since 2004. With three million feral swine, however, our swine population continues to be at risk. Although we find two or three infected domestic backyard-type swine herds infected each year across the state, the national rules allow for us to maintain our free status since they don’t meet the definition of “commercial.” Most of our commercial swine farms are in the panhandle and consist of thousands of pigs located in biosecure facilities that don’t co-mingle with hogs outside of that company’s operations. We do have an obligation for protection of our non-commercial swine, cattle and the public to continue to maintain effective surveillance streams and outreach programs so everyone understands the risk from feral swine. If you weren’t aware, one of the fastest-growing animal populations affected by pseudorabies infections now are dogs involved in Hog Dog contests. The TAHC still requires testing of adult hogs for both diseases for change of ownership and also has surveillance streams at all domestic swine slaughter plants in Texas and from veterinary practitioner submissions.

Believe it or not, the USDA does not consider our Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) program, which began in 1997, to be an eradication program. That is unfortunate as it is a disease that could be eradicated with just a little federal fiscal support. There are only about five or six states that are still finding positives, but Texas is one of them. We used to find hundreds of positives a year but now routinely just find one horse positive every couple of months. The high-risk populations at this point are old horses (>20) and any horse with a connection to Mexico, especially racing Quarter Horses. Contingent upon funding, TAHC may consider some creative surveillance programs focusing on those populations in the future to see if we can expedite the eradication of EIA in Texas.

Texas has not had a scrapie-positive sheep in more than five years but still routinely gets traces from other states. What started out as a black-faced breed show sheep problem has moved through all the different sheep breeds now, and the prevalence nationwide is very low. The USDA has indicated, however, that a national goat scrapie program will be announced soon, and since we have more goats than any other state, I am sure we will be back in the scrapie business at some level. I believe we will be successful in eradication of scrapie from the U.S. sheep population within 10 years.

There is one common denominator to all of the existing eradication programs in that veterinary practitioners are at the heart of the surveillance streams used to detect new cases. I want to thank each and every one of you for your role in protecting Texas livestock from the re-emergence of these diseases. Even though we don’t always give them the press or air-play of emerging or foreign disease situations, it is still critical that we stay vigilant for their presence in Texas. Thanks for all you do in that regard! **TV**